

## **2.0 The Application Site and Proposed Development**

### **2.1 Introduction**

- 2.1.1 This chapter describes the application site and its surroundings and provides a full description of the Proposed Development. It is on the basis of this that the potential effects of the project have been considered and reported in this ES.
- 2.1.2 The area is subject to the Proposed Development is identified in the planning application boundary plans, which is set out in Appendix 2.1 to this Chapter.

### **2.2 Site Location and Characteristics**

#### ***Site Location***

- 2.2.1 The Site is located on the north-western edge of Bicester. Bicester is a town and civil parish in the Cherwell district of north-eastern Oxfordshire. It was awarded Garden Town status in 2014 with North-West Bicester area also identified as a potential eco-town location in accordance with the then extant supplement to what was then Planning Policy Statement 1. The Site is some 2.5km to the north west of Bicester Town Centre which includes a full range of facilities including supermarkets, a doctor's surgery, independent High Street shops, a post office, pubs, restaurants as well as Bicester Retail Outlet Village. To the northwest is the village of Bucknell. The site is well situated in relation to Bicester North Railway Station, which lies broadly 2.3km approximately 10-minute cycle from the centre of the site to the south. Approximately 3.4km or 15-minute cycle south of the site lies Bicester Village Railway Station. Bicester North Railway Station is on the Chiltern Main Line and services are operated by Chiltern Railways. The station also offers sheltered, secure bicycling parking facilities by way of cycle stands which are monitored by CCTV; there is capacity for 65 bicycles. As such, there is the opportunity for journeys to the station to be made by bicycle for onwards travel by rail.
- 2.2.2 The Site includes Bucknell Road/Bicester Road and is bordered, to the south-west, by the London to Birmingham Railway, and to the south-east by the town ring road A4095 (Lords Lane). Land immediately to the north-east of the site is the subject of an outline application submitted for Firethorn Developments Ltd for up to 530 dwellings, open space, infrastructure and engineering works (21/01630/OUT).
- 2.2.3 To the north-east of the adjacent application lies Elmsbrook, the first phase of the North West Bicester development which is being built out and is well advanced with Primary school, Play, community and employment facilities operational. Beyond is the B4100 Banbury Road

which links Bicester with Junction 10 of the M40 and the villages between including Caversfield and Bainton.

- 2.2.4 To the south, the Site abuts Bicester itself.

### ***Site Characteristics***

- 2.2.5 The site comprises some 177 hectares and forms part of a swathe of agricultural land that wraps around the north western edge of Bicester. Two farms are located within the part of the land to which the application relates (Lords Farm and Hawkwell Farm), both of which are to be retained by the landowners and are therefore excluded from the red line boundary of the application site. The site lies within the catchment of the River Ray, three tributaries of which flow through the site. The River Bure runs through the eastern part of the Site on a north-south axis before turning south to join a second watercourse (known as Langford Brook) running through the southern part of the Site. The Bure then continues south through the Bure Park Nature Reserve and Bicester town.
- 2.2.6 The surrounding landscape is shaped by the River Bure, whilst within the site the topography is defined by two watercourses. The site and the local landscape is comparatively flat in character with the local landform gently falling from west to east towards Bicester (98m AOD to 80m AOD on its eastern point close to the A4095).

### ***Designations***

- 2.2.7 The site is not subject to any national, regional or local landscape or ecological designations. The Environment Agency Flood Map identifies the area of land immediately adjacent to the River Bure as falling within Flood Zones 2 and 3, with the remaining majority of the site falling within Flood Zone 1.
- 2.2.8 The Bure Park Nature Reserve, located approximately 60 metres to the south at the closest point, is designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR).
- 2.2.9 The nearest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is the Ardley Cutting and Quarry located some 600 metres to the north west at the closest point. Beyond that are the Ardley Trackways (approximately 2km to the north west) and the Stratton Audley Quarries (approximately 2km to the east).

## 2.3 Description of Development

2.3.1 The Description of Development for the Planning Application captures its mixed use nature and is as follows:

*"Mixed Use Development of up to 3,100 dwellings (including extra care); residential and care accommodation(C2); mixed use local centre (comprising Commercial, Business and Service Uses, residential uses, C2 uses, Local Community Uses (F2(a) and F2(b)), hot food takeaways, public house, wine bar); employment area (B2, B8, E(g)); Learning and Non-residential institutions (Class F1) including primary school (plus land to allow extension of existing Gagle Brook primary school); Green Infrastructure including formal (including playing fields) and informal open space, allotments, landscape, biodiversity and amenity space; burial ground; play space (including Neaps/Leaps/MUGA); changing facilities; ground mounted photovoltaic arrays; sustainable drainage systems; movement network comprising new highway, cycle and pedestrian routes and access from highway network; car parking; infrastructure (including utilities); engineering works (including ground modelling); demolition".*

2.3.2 Within the mixed use area and the employment area, permission is sought for some 9,000 sq metres of retail commercial and community uses comprising:

- "up to 2,490 sq m (GEA) of commercial uses within Classes E(a) retail; E(b) food and drink; E9(c) services and the following sui generis uses hot food takeaways, public house, wine bar";
- "up to 3,750 sq m (GEA) employment uses with Use Classed E(g), B2 and B8"
- Community uses, nurseries etc within the use classes described above;
- Residential uses as part of a mixed use scheme within the mixed use area.

2.3.3 The proposal includes up to 30% affordable housing. The final quantum and mix of affordable housing uses will be agreed in discussion with the Local Planning Authority.

2.3.4 The application for planning permission is made in outline with all matters reserved for future approval other than access. The details of the access arrangements for the development are to be approved as part of the application.

2.3.5 The disposition of uses is set out in the Development Framework Plan (HLM066- DFP001 Rev A) which is appended to this Chapter as Appendix 2.2.

## 2.4 Additional Development Parameters

### *Layout and Quantums of Development*

- 2.4.1 The layout of development remains a sensitively designed, well planned scheme which respects the site's physical setting but also creates a strong relationship with the adjoining elements of North West Bicester allocation. The proposal is consistent with the North West Bicester Vision and Master Plan adopted by Cherwell as a Supplementary Planning Document in 2016 and satisfies policy Bicester 1 of the Cherwell Local Plan.
- 2.4.2 The proposal responds to the features of the site retaining where possible existing important landscape elements. Indeed the master plan is the outcome of a landscape led design approach which retains existing and creates new landscape characteristics and where retained development is offset from such features which are incorporated into the green infrastructure proposals for the development. The landscape led approach and change to the development boundary provides a clear and logical edge to the development with the incorporation of open green uses towards this edge, a green buffer and separation to the village of Bucknell is secured.
- 2.4.3 Community and commercial facilities are proposed at a key node in the movement network to be created within the site. As such the need to make journeys by car as opposed to other modes is minimised.
- 2.4.4 The broad description of development and quanta of development are set out above. Further information on the quantum of other uses is provided below.

### *Building Heights*

- 2.4.5 Whereas variation in building heights across the site will be appropriate to support the character of the new development a number of basic parameters are proposed within the application as follows:

Mixed use area, school(s), employment area	up to 14.0m
Residential areas	up to 12.5m
Residential areas along primary street	up to 12.5m
Photovoltaic systems	up to 4.0m

- 2.4.6 The maximum building height (e.g. 14m) is measured from ground level to ridge line excluding any point features.

### ***Education***

2.4.7 The application proposals make provision for new capacity to delivery primary school education within the application site. Specifically this comprises:

- A new 2FE primary school located in the most accessible part of the site;
- Land to allow the expansion of Gagle Brook Primary school located immediately to the east of the application site. The academy is presently 1FE with the additional land intended to allow expansion to 2FE through the delivery of school pitches within the application site.

2.4.8 In respect of the secondary education, it is not anticipated that the application site will be required to make specific provision. In accordance with the North West Bicester SPD, the preferred location for the delivery of secondary education within North West Bicester is on land to the west of the railway line. Accordingly Application 14/01641/OUT (Land Adj To Bicester Road and South West Of Avonbury Business Park Howes Lane Bicester) sets aside the land necessary to serve the wider NW Bicester development. The secondary school is intended to deliver 8 Forms of Entry.

### ***Transport and Movement***

2.4.9 The application proposals include a comprehensive movement network that facilitates movement by non car modes. Specifically the following are proposed:

- Walking and cycling Strategy
- Public Transport Strategy
- Vehicle Access Strategy.

2.4.10 The North West Strategic Link Road – the realignment of the A4095 – is located within and to the south of the site. Phase 1 of the scheme has been completed and has delivered the rail underbridge to accommodate the realigned Howes Lane and a separate underpass which will provide a new route for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.

2.4.11 In more detail:

- a) A permeable network of high quality built cycle and walking routes will be provided across the application site and connecting to existing and planned provision in the area;

- b) High quality bus routes will be provided, diverting into the site, to facilitate frequent and direct bus connection to the rest of the NW Bicester allocation and to other key local destinations;
- c) A primary route alignment (for which consent is sought) is proposed within the site to accommodate all modes of travel including public transport;
- d) Connection of the primary route to the wider highway network will result in the principal access points into the site. The principal access points are to be taken off the realigned; A4095 to the east of Bucknell Road and also off the A4095 approximately 200 metres to the west of its roundabout junction with the B4100. Both are proposed to be signalised;
- e) The primary street will be complemented by a permeable network of secondary streets of 4.8 metres in width plus tertiary routes, shared surfaces and private drives;
- f) Secondary access will be obtained from the Bucknell Road in a location adjacent to the proposed primary school;
- g) A low key access of Bainton Road is proposed to facilitate maintenance of the photovoltaic arrays and potentially low key access to the green infrastructure
- h) Traffic calming measures are proposed along Bucknell and Bicester Road along with pedestrian crossings to reduce traffic flows towards Bucknell; and
- i) The southern most section of Bicester Road, south of the new strategic link road, will be downgraded to a footway and cycleway.

2.4.12 The realignment of the lower end of Bucknell Road as part of the transport proposals in the area, together with the provision of traffic management and/or calming measures on Bucknell Road, will effectively reduce traffic numbers and ensure the avoidance of local traffic impacts eg in Bucknell.

2.4.13 The development would facilitate the construction of an access into the adjoining Elmsbrook development to the east.

2.4.14 The movement proposals build on, and are consistent with, the highway and transport measures being delivered through the other NW Bicester developments

2.4.15 Further on site improvements to the footpath and cycle links connecting to points beyond the site, e.g. along Lords Lane and to and through Bure Park, are proposed

***Green Infrastructure and Open Space***

- 2.4.16 Important to the Master Plan for the application site is the Framework provided by the existing green infrastructure within the site (including streams and habitats) and therefore, every effort has been made to retain the majority of trees and hedgerows where possible and to design the proposals to include multi-use green infrastructure spaces, habitats and connections.
- 2.4.17 The primary existing landscape features within the site are the woodlands or mature trees located alongside Lords Lane and also the railway line (respectively the southern and eastern boundaries of the sites), and along the stream corridors within the site. Immediately beyond the site are the wooded areas to the north (between the site and the village of Bucknell) and to the north east between the application site and the "Firethorn" site.
- 2.4.18 Hedgerows of varying quality mark the boundaries of the fields that presently comprise the site.
- 2.4.19 With regard to the existing landscape features of the site, the development proposals:
- retain the existing woodland and water courses;
  - retain the substantial majority of existing hedgerows noting that there limited areas where trees or hedgerows need to be removed or broken as a necessity of creating a sustainable masterplan form including permeable movement network.
  - only a small number of hedgerows are to be removed in their entirety for instance to allow the establishment of the local centre
- 2.4.20 Where hedgerows are retained they are set in landscape corridors which are also intended to in a number of instances to support features such as ditches and swales that form part of the sustainable drainage system.
- 2.4.21 Additional landscape features are proposed comprising pockets of new woodland, and additional hedgerow and tree planting essentially within the structural landscape of the development. Additional appropriate planting will take place with the relevant development parcels.
- 2.4.22 The Green Infrastructure network will serve a number of functions: recreation (sport and informal) and leisure; movement by foot and cycle, health and wellbeing, supporting and enhancing biodiversity, sustainable drainage.
- 2.4.23 The Green and Blue Infrastructure Network, is designed as a series of interconnected corridors and spaces, each linked into the Network as a whole. The Riparian corridor is

retained and reinforced to create a green and blue corridor within and around the site. Green spaces within the site – informal open spaces/country park, village green, are connected internally by green corridors based around hedgerow corridors. Green infrastructure assets immediately beyond the site are similar linked into the overall framework by the provision of linkages within the site to its edges.

2.4.24 Policy Bicester 1 in the Cherwell Local Plan seeks the provision of some 40% of the total site area within North West Bicester as Green Infrastructure – explicitly to include sports pitches, parks and recreation areas, play spaces, allotments, burial ground and SUDS. At least half of the green infrastructure should be publicly accessible.

2.4.25 The development proposals envisage the provision of some 80 hectares of green and blue infrastructure providing in excess of 40% as Green Infrastructure and will therefore meet the requirement in Policy Bicester 1 in the Cherwell Local Plan. Private garden land is not included in this assessment.

2.4.26 In terms of physical space the standards set out in the Cherwell Local Plan require the following areas to meet the needs of the resident population of 3,100 homes:

- Children’s Play – LEAPS/LAPS/NEAPS etc – some 5.6 hectares
- Formal adult sports pitches – some 8.0 hectares

2.4.27 The Development Framework Plan shows how the needs for a childrens play area may be readily accommodated within the Green Infrastructure network of the site.

2.4.28 In respect of the sports pitches, it is not anticipated that the application site will be required to provide the pitches implied in the Council’s open space standards – although the Development Plan and Description of Development provides the flexibility to do so. In reality, the proposed Himley Village element of the North West Bicester development is expected to deliver the sports pitches to serve the entirety of North West Bicester. Application 14/02121/OUT sets aside the land necessary to serve the wider NW Bicester development. The focus in one location, enables a higher standard of provision and facilitates long term management and maintenance. In this eventuality – land identified as capable of accommodating sports pitches within the application site will revert to other open space uses.

2.4.29 The proposals for Green Infrastructure within the application site will result in a net biodiversity gain.



***Sustainable Urban Drainage System***

- 2.4.30 The application proposals include a sustainable urban drainage system to attenuate surface water run-off from the site allowing for climate change.
- 2.4.31 The proposals includes various means of conveying, cleaning and attenuating flows by sustainable means. The SuDs strategy is closely integrated with the green infrastructure proposals to facilitate recreation and biodiversity benefit also.
- 2.4.32 The proposals envisage a number of localised smaller scale attenuation areas allowing attenuation to be closely related to specific development parcels. Discharge will eventually take place into the existing streams on site.

***Ground Mounted Photovoltaic Array(Solar Farm)***

- 2.4.33 On the basis of a On the basis of a careful consideration of various options to secure energy generation as part of the application proposals, including consideration of the options within or adjacent to the site to generate electricity, from wind turbines, proposals have been developed for a large scale photovoltaic system (Solar Farm) in the northern part of the application site, sitting outside the Green Infrastructure Network.
- 2.4.34 The proposals for a solar farm will sit alongside other renewable options, for instance roof mounted solar panels and air source heat pumps, and will make a significant contribution towards the application proposals addressing climate change and carbon reduction.

***Demolition***

- 2.4.35 Two farm houses, Hawkswell Farm and Lords Lane, do not form part of the application site but are to be surrounded by it. The buildings are therefore expected to be retained by the landowner.
- 2.4.36 There are no other substantial buildings within the site. Demolition works to be approved under the application are therefore likely to be of small scale features or any areas hardstanding.

***Phasing and Delivery***

- 2.4.37 The proposals set out in the outline planning application are envisaged outline provision is envisaged to be delivered over approximately a 12-year period with construction commencing in 2023/24, first completions in 2024 and development completion estimated in around 2035/36.

## 2.5 Consideration of Alternatives

- 2.5.1 The 2017 EIA Regulations require any alternatives to the Proposed Development that have been studied by the Applicant to be outlined and the reasons for their rejection set out.
- 2.5.2 At the outset it is worth highlighting that the substantial majority of the site is allocated for development within the Cherwell Local Plan. In so doing all various alternative locations and distributions of development were considered with North West Bicester identified as a highly sustainable development to meet the development and wider requirements of Bicester and Cherwell.
- 2.5.3 In terms of alternative forms and design of the Proposed Development, a range of existing site considerations have been taken into account. These matters include:
- Land Uses:** The need to accommodate an appropriate mix, distribution and layout of uses to support a sustainable community is a key consideration and guided by the Cherwell Local Plan.
- Access:** Existing and potential connections to the wider transport network dictate the options for providing connections with the wider highway and movement networks.
- 2.5.4 Particular matters that have been considered include the following issues.
- 2.5.5 **Education** – Consideration has been given to the requirement for education and the location of a new FE school in the context of other planned provision to serve North West Bicester including the location of the adjacent Gagle Brook school. In considering the respective options each was rejected in favour of the preferred location which maximises accessibility and walkability while promoting synergistic links, and a reduction in the need to travel, between the facilities in the local centre. This approach has also allowed for provision to be made for the expansion of Gagle Brook school if required.
- 2.5.6 **Outdoor sport** – Consideration has been given to the requirement for sports pitches and facilities and the possibility of including pitches within the planning application. However, it is not anticipated that the application site will be required to provide the pitches implied in the Council's open space standards – as the proposed Himley Village element of the North West Bicester development is expected to deliver the sports pitches to serve the entirety of North West Bicester. The focus in one location, enables a higher standard of provision and facilitates long term management and maintenance.
- 2.5.7 **Sewage treatment** – while provision for onsite treatment had been envisaged as part of the NW Bicester SPD, discussions with service providers indicated that this was no longer likely to be the preferred choice and may lead to additional environmental impacts in

comparison with utilising and/or enhancing the existing infrastructure. No specific provision of land for sewage treatment has therefore been pursued.

- 2.5.8 **Mixed use development** – Consideration has been given to the requirements for commercial, retail and service uses and need for uses to support the Proposed new homes with a mix of local amenities. Both higher and lower levels of provision were considered but rejected in favour of the preferred balanced approach that is consistent with the policy context and seeks to provide sufficient uses to support local trips but not a scale of provision that will attract trips from wider areas.
- 2.5.9 **Drainage ponds** – Consideration has been given to the requirements for and location of ponds to serve proposed layout and distribution of land uses. The indicative location of proposed drainage ponds for the Proposed Development is the preferred approach with the option of more extensive attenuation areas not being pursued at this stage.
- 2.5.10 **Densities** – Consideration has been given to an appropriate range of densities across the site and the overall density that would result. Both higher and lower average densities were considered but rejected in favour of the preferred balanced approach that is consistent with the policy context and seeks to support walkable community concepts yet deliver other aspects sustainability including green infrastructure.
- 2.5.11 **Carbon Emissions** – various options for addressing carbon emissions and climate change issues are described in this Environmental Statement. Options will be developed as the proposals become more detailed. Specifically consideration was given to the inclusion of a wind turbine or turbines on or off site but in recognition of the potential for environmental effects plus the effectiveness of ground mounted photovoltaic arrays, it is the latter which is the preferred option being pursued in the Proposed Development.
- 2.5.12 **Site Boundary** – the northern boundary of the application has been considered carefully. The northern boundary of the allocation in the Cherwell Local Plan is arbitrarily drawn having no relationship with any identifiable physical or landscape led boundaries on the ground. Based on a careful landscape based assessment, the application site extends beyond the allocation boundary for three principal purposes: a landscape led approach to employ existing field boundaries and/or definable features within the western part of the site, to accommodate additional primarily open green uses within the site as well as the photovoltaic systems (Solar Farm) to make a substantial contribution towards the delivery of sustainability aspirations and to provide certainty to the residents of Bucknell village that the NW Bicester development will not encroach further, as the green infrastructure creates an enduring edge to the development, with no built form against the boundary of the village. The revised boundary enables the establishment of a landscape led Masterplan

which builds upon the existing landscape features of the site and allows a substantial expansion of green infrastructure.